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The Labyrinth of the Wind and the Artifice of Eternity: A Study of the Lyric Poetry of William Butler Yeats

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THE LABYRINTH OF THE WIND AND THE ARTIFICE OF ETERNITY: A STUDY OF THE LYRIC POETRY OF WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS

by

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ABSTRACT

This study of the lyric poetry of William Butler Yeats concentrates on his ideas about nature and art, with a focus on the imagery of the wind. Though each of Yeats's poems may be read and enjoyed individually, a study of the body of Yeats's lyric poems gives the reader a better understanding of a symbol such as the wind. As a whole, the poems form a narrative of the development of Yeats's mind; by looking closely at the single symbol of the wind, we gain insight into the development of Yeats's ideas about art and nature. In Yeats's early poetry wind imagery, as well as other nature imagery, is prominent, but as Yeats's poetic career evolves, nature imagery--including that of the wind--becomes less frequent. By the last phase of Yeats's career, his source of inspiration has shifted from nature to art. Nature signifies change, but art for Yeats symbolizes the eternal and the unchanging. This paper explores Yeats's use of the wind as symbol including the shift in focus from nature to art.

Introduction

The wind is a major symbol in the lyric poetry of William Butler Yeats. Sometimes the wind is literal, a part of nature and an incidental part of the setting; at other times, however, the wind has symbolic meaning as well. Though each of Yeats's poems may be read and enjoyed individually, a study of the body of Yeats's lyric poems gives the reader a better understanding of a symbol such as the wind. As a whole, the poems form a sort of narrative of the development of Yeats's mind. By focusing on a single symbol, such as the wind, we gain insight into the development of Yeats's ideas, especially those about nature and art.

Yeats, like other poets, draws his use of wind symbolism from natural associations, and to understand how Yeats uses the wind, conventional definitions provide a good starting point. Wind, "a current of air, of any degree of force perceptible to the senses, occurring naturally in the atmosphere," can be anything from a breath to a tornado (OED 365). Winds can be both helpful and harmful. The wind can be a cooling relief on a hot day, but strong winds such as hurricanes can devastate the earth. Winds can transport pollen which helps spread vegetation and rebuild depleted land, and, at the same time, they can transport large swarms of grasshoppers which can annihilate crops and other plants for miles. Some images evoked by the wind seem contradictory. For example, the

wind can signify violence, fury, swiftness, freedom, and unrestrainable character as well as mutability, fickleness, lightness, and emptiness (OED 366). The wind can refer to "something empty, vain, trifling, or unsubstantial" such as "empty talk, vain or ineffectual speech"; it can also refer to "a force or influence that drives or carries one (or something) along" (OED 367). These contradictions are representative of the duality of life. For example, freedom, while offering unrestraint, carries with it the responsibility of choice. The opposing forces in Yeats's life appear in his poetry; the wind in his poetry, both as a natural phenomenon and as a symbol, embodies this duality.

The wind, a major element in nature, is part of Yeats's poetic vocabulary and is one symbol which suggests ideas that offer insights into his observations of the world and the development of his thoughts. Along with other nature imagery, wind imagery is prominent in Yeats's early poetry, but as Yeats's poetic career evolves, nature imagery--including that of the wind--becomes less frequent and important. It does not disappear entirely, but Yeats's view of life changes as he ages, and by the last phase of his career his source of inspiration has drifted from nature--something changeable and unpredictable--to art--something lasting and dependable. This study explores the role and function of the wind in Yeats's lyric poetry, especially in terms of its shifting symbolic properties and implications including the shift in focus from nature to art.

Early Poetry: Escape from Reality

Thomas Parkinson describes Yeats's early poetry as "praising always the remote and vague, yearning for a life of dream, casual revery, and innocent inconsequential delight" (Early Verse 53), and David Daiches remarks that Yeats's early poetry "was frankly escapist, . . . and its purpose was not to interpret life but to compensate for it" (124). Yeats's early poetry is full of images of wandering, searching for happiness, and longing for a better life, and he often looks to nature to fulfill his desire for peace. Though references to nature are prevalent in Yeats's early poetry, he does not refer to the wind in every poem, but since the wind is part of nature, a survey of general nature imagery, whether or not the reference to the wind is explicit, will help situate nature's importance in Yeats's poetry.

Yeats begins his lyric poetry expressing his desire for a return to happier times. "The Song of the Happy Shepherd" (1889) is full of nostalgia for a Golden Age:

> The woods of Arcady are dead,
> And over is their antique joy;
> Of old the world on dreaming fed;
> Grey Truth is now her painted toy.

"The woods of Arcady" symbolize the past to which Yeats turns in order to escape the present which he feels is inferior. In "The Indian Upon God" (1886) Yeats turns to the natural world in the present for spiritual comfort. Nature "rocks" the poet's spirit:

> I passed along the water's edge below the humid trees,
> My spirit rocked in evening light, the rushes round my knees,
> My spirit rocked in sleep and sighs.

The poet observes and listens to various living things--moorfowl, lotus, roebuck, and peacock--meditate upon God, each creature seeing God as an image of itself. For example, the moorfowl says:

> Who holds the world between His bill and made us strong or weak
> Is an undying moorfowl, and He lives beyond the sky.
> The rains are from His dripping wing, the moon beams from His eye.

The lotus also ruminates on the appearance of God:

> Who made the world and ruleth it, He hangeth on a stalk,
> For I am in His image made, and all this tinkling tide
> Is but a sliding drop of rain between His petals wide.

John Unterecker states that though each creature's perception of God is different, "each person's vision is also necessarily the only valid one," since "[God] is in fact only what He is uniquely seen to be by each individual" (70). Hazard Adams offers two contradictory ways of interpreting this poem: "Either God inhabits all animal and vegetable forms, or each of these forms cannot see beyond itself,

forcing God's image into its own shape" (40).

While nature in "The Indian Upon God" provides spiritual comfort, it serves as a physical retreat as well in "The Indian to his Love" (1886):

> The island dreams under the dawn
> And great boughs drop tranquility . . .
>
> Here we will moor our lonely ship
> And wander ever with woven hands,
> Murmuring softly lip to lip,
> Along the grass, along the sands,
> Murmuring how far away are the unquiet woods.

The "island" is a paradise where two lovers can be together in peace. Images of nature here and in other poems reflect Yeats's desire for harmony. In "Ephemera," which deals with a fading love and a "Passion [that] has often worn our wandering hearts," nature reflects the lovers' sad feelings and their situation in general:

> Pensive they paced along the faded leaves, . . .
>
> The woods were round them, and the yellow leaves
> Fell like faint meteors in the gloom, and once
> A rabbit old and lame limped down the path;
> Autumn was over him.

Love has faded like the leaves; the atmosphere of gloom corresponds to the lovers' sadness. The lovers are looking for peace and reprieve from a "waning" love. The last section of the poem offers no reprieve from wandering:

'Ah, do not mourn,' he said,
'That we are tired, for other loves await us;
Hate on and love through unrepining hours.
Before us lies eternity, our souls
Are love, and a continual farewell.'

Though the lovers will seek other loves, they will continue to wander and seek peace for their tired souls.

The desire for freedom from chaos in the world appears in "The Madness of King Goll" (1887), which deals with a king who was victorious in battle but lost his mind amid the fighting and killing. Now he wanders aimlessly in "wood and hill / Through summer's heat and cold." The poem's refrain, "They will not hush, the leaves a flutter round me, the beech leaves old," introduces the wind, without actually mentioning it, as a kind of objective correlative for King Goll's frame of mind. The fluttering leaves correspond to his restlessness and reflect his wandering. Their ceaseless sound and motion indicate his madness and lack of peace. He turns to nature for his home and says:

And now I wander in the woods
When summer gluts the golden bees,
Or in autumnal solitudes
Arise the leopard-coloured trees;
Or when along the wintry strands
The cormorants shiver on their rock
I wander on, and wave my hands,
And sing, and shake my heavy locks.

Goll is ill at ease in the world and seeks comfort in nature. While the leaves reflect his madness, they also seduce and soothe him. Adams suggests that the

leaves may remind Goll "of his own past acts, of aging, of death or . . . whisper of something to be sought" (42).

"The Lake Isle of Innisfree" (1890) also deals with the desire to escape from a hectic world and enjoy a peaceful life in nature:

> I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree;
> And a small cabin build there, of clay and wattles made:
> Nine bean rows will I have there, a hive for the honey-bee,
> And live alone in the bee-loud glade.
>
> And I shall have some peace there, for peace comes dropping slow.

The idea of a small cabin in a natural setting provides a contrast to "the roadway" and "the pavements grey," the urban environment in which Yeats conceived the idea for this poem.

As well as focusing on nature, Yeats's early poetry exhibits his knowledge of ancient Irish legends. "The Song of Wandering Aengus" (1897) contains explicitly Irish imagery. The poem begins, "I went out to the hazel wood, / Because a fire was in my head." Yeats explains, "The hazel tree was the Irish tree of Life or of Knowledge, and in Ireland it was doubtless, as elsewhere, the tree of the heavens" (Poems 630). The Irish character Aengus is a prototype of Yeats's wanderer. He retreats to nature--the hazel wood--to look for answers and to put out the fire in his head. In the poem a fish caught by the speaker becomes a "glimmering girl" who runs away but attracts his attention and, in a sense, casts a spell on him. He vows to search until he finds her:

Though I am old with wandering
Through hollow lands and hilly lands,
I will find out where she has gone,
And kiss her lips and take her hands.

Yeats explains the source of his imagery: "The Tribes of the Goddess Danu can take all shapes, and those that are in the water take often the shape of the fish" (Poems 626). Aengus is the "Master of Love," the Irish god of love, so he represents the search for love (Poems 591). The fire in his head appears to be emotional disquietitude arising from the fire of love and physical desire. The poem indicates that love is elusive like the runaway girl.

In the section "The Wind Among the Reeds" (1899), wind imagery becomes prominent. Robert O'Driscoll specifies as themes for this group of poems "the separation of material and spiritual" and "the tension between the broken world we perceive with our senses and the ideal world we are capable of apprehending with our imaginations" (52). The Sidhe, or fairies, according to Irish legends, travel in the wind. In his explanatory notes Yeats says, "Sidhe is also Gaelic for wind, and certainly the Sidhe have much to do with the wind. They journey in whirling wind, the winds that were called the dance of the daughters of Herodias in the Middle Ages" (Poems 590). The Sidhe are sometimes sinister and, as Yeats notes, "are said to steal brides just after their marriage" (Poems 624). O'Driscoll explains the significance of the title, "The Wind Among the Reeds." He relates Yeats's experience of hearing "the wind blowing a bed of reeds by the border of a little lake" and says that Yeats "associates the scene with the 'inmost voice of

Celtic sadness, and of Celtic longing for infinite things the world has never seen.' The fragile body when stirred by spiritual longing becomes like a 'wind-blown reed' . . . . The wind among the reeds then becomes a symbol of the spirit stirring the human heart, with longing and lamentation, with lamentation over an imperfect material world, with longing for a perfect spiritual world" (49).

In "The Hosting of the Sidhe" (1893), two legendary figures, Caoilte and Niamh, try to seduce mortals from the human world to the fairy world: "Away, come away: / Empty your heart of its mortal dream." The line, "The winds awaken, the leaves whirl round," indicates the presence of the sensuous Sidhe: "Our cheeks are pale, our hair is unbound, / Our breasts are heaving, our eyes are agleam." Though attractive, the Sidhe are also ominous. While the fairy world appears inviting, the Sidhe also threaten: "And if any gaze on our rushing band, / We come between him and the deed of his hand, / We come between him and the hope of his heart." Yeats states in his notes, "If anyone becomes too much interested in them, and sees them over much, he loses all interest in ordinary things" (Poems 622). He gives several examples of humans seduced by the Sidhe. For example, Yeats relates a story told by a Galway woman. After being enchanted by the Sidhe, a boy becomes obsessed with his garden and totally oblivious to everything else. The boy "never went to Mass, or to church, or to fairs, or to market, or to stand on the cross roads, or to hurling, or to nothing . . . but the crop he has is grand, and you may know well he has some to help him" (Poems 622). Yeats says, "One hears many stories of the kind; and a man whose

son is believed to go out riding among them at night tells me that he is careless about everything, and lies in bed until it is late in the day" (Poems 622-623).

The poem, "The Everlasting Voices" (1896), which directly succeeds "The Hosting of the Sidhe," answers the Sidhe and tells them, "O sweet everlasting voices, be still." The fact that the Sidhe are present "in birds, in wind on the hill, / In shaken boughs," and "in tide on the shore"--all references to nature--implies that the Sidhe may symbolize something other than fairies. They may be a reflection of our inner desires to escape the mortal world; they may, as O'Driscoll states, represent "the call of the spiritual" (54).

"The Stolen Child" (1886) also deals with the seductive power of fairies who try to lure humans into their world. The poem's nature imagery--"rocky highland," "leafy island," "flapping herons," "wave of moonlight," "dim grey sands"--presents an attractive picture of fairyland. In the poem's refrain, the supernatural beings entice humans to take a flight into fairyland:

> Come away, O Human child!
> To the waters and the wild
> With a faery, hand in hand,
> For the world's more full of weeping than you can understand.

Nature is calling us to leave a complicated, stressful life and enjoy the peace and beauty of the natural world. If the human chooses the fairy world, however, he must give up human pleasures: "the lowing / Of the calves on the warm hillside / . . . the kettle on the hob." In this poem Yeats distinguishes between wild and cultivated nature. The calves, also part of nature, are different from the "flapping

herons" referred to above. The calves are raised by humans for human needs, whereas the "flapping herons" are free and uncontrolled by man. The wind, as on the wings of herons, for example, often symbolizes the desire to escape. At the same time, however, we see in "The Hosting of the Sidhe" and "The Stolen Child" that this freedom entails certain unpleasant consequences. As the fairies "entice the human child from the world, they capriciously lament that he will no longer enjoy things in that world" (Adams 43). If a mortal leaves the human world, he will have to leave his loved ones. He will escape troubles, but he will also have to relinquish joys.

In his notes on "The Unappeasable Host" (1896), Yeats tells us he uses the wind to symbolize vague desires and hopes. He says, "I use the wind as a symbol of vague desires and hopes, not merely because the Sidhe are in the wind, or because the wind bloweth as it listeth, but because wind and spirit and vague desire have been associated everywhere" (Poems 626). In this poem, as in "The Hosting of the Sidhe," the fairies are calling mortals, but here the tone is more sinister as the seductive, attractive element is missing. The poem begins:

> The Danaan children laugh, in cradles of wrought gold,
> And clap their hands together, and half close their eyes,
> For they will ride the North when the ger-eagle flies.
> With heavy whitening wings, and a heart fallen cold.

The Danaan children are fairies who ride the North wind. According to Norman Jeffares, "The original version's third line ran: 'For winds will bear them gently when the eagle flies,'" and a second version ran: "'For they will ride the wind

when the gier-eagle flies'" (Commentary 51). An interesting aspect of this poem is the reference to "cradles of wrought gold"--something artificial. The fairies, which represent natural desires, sleep in artificial beds. The mixture of nature and artifice corresponds to Yeats's use of poetry--artifice--to express natural impulses. "A heart fallen cold" represents the inhuman quality of the fairies as well as the attitude the poet must assume in making his personal experiences universal. The poem continues:

> I kiss my wailing child and press it to my breast,
> And hear the narrow graves calling my child and me
> Desolate winds that cry over the wandering sea;
> Desolate winds that hover in the flaming west;
> Desolate winds that beat the doors of Heaven, and beat
> The doors of Hell and blow there many a whimpering ghost.

Perhaps for Yeats the uncontrollable wind symbolizes his sense of vague desires and hopes because man does not have control over his desires just as he does not have control over the wind. The wind here also represents various evils in the world. Many legends provide explanations of unknown phenomena, and the sinister attributes of the wind symbolize life-threatening forces. "I kiss my wailing child and press it to my breast" expresses the mother's anxieties about the safety of her child in an unpredictable world. She cannot always protect her child, so the wind is an appropriate symbol for anything that might threaten her child or any evil in the world, natural or unnatural.

The last two lines of the poem indicate that the winds or the Sidhe have succeeded in attracting the human heart: "O heart the winds have shaken, the

unappeasable host / Is comelier than candles at Mother Mary's feet." Humans are vulnerable to the heart's desires which they often must suppress. These desires help explain Yeats's comparison of the host to candles at the feet of the Virgin Mary. The Irish pagan legends, so important to Yeats in establishing an Irish literary identity, conflict with the Christian religion. Jeffares explains, "The Danaan children stand for Tuatha de Danaan, the race of the gods of Danu, the mother of the ancient gods of Ireland, hence in the popular imagination, fairies" (Commentary 51). The "unappeasable host" "is substituted for the mediatory candles of prayer and supplication . . . and the decision," says Adams, "is for Ancient Ireland against Holy Ireland" (66). Yeats's Anglo-Irish background alienated him from the Irish Catholics (MacGloin 471-480), which is perhaps one reason he sought to produce a literary tradition to which everyone in Ireland could relate. At times, the human feels his desires are more natural than the behavior society expects. He experiences "tension between the conventional religion [he] knows and the unconventional longing [he] fears" (O'Driscoll 53). The wind "awakens man's thirst for spiritual perfection" as well as "his consciousness of the imperfection of the material world" (O'Driscoll 54). Man is attracted to the fairies who call him from worldly troubles. And they are unappeasable, meaning that the human cannot expect them to go away without a difficult inner struggle. While the wind represents evils that threaten the child, it also signifies internal forces which call us to question our expected actions and

way of living. The winds affect Heaven and Hell equally. No one is exempt from inner struggles.

The wind as an evil or destructive force is a prevalent image in Yeats's poetry. In "The Pity of Love" (1892), the wind explicitly threatens:

> The cold wet winds ever blowing,
> And the shadowy hazel grove
> Where mouse-grey waters are flowing,
> Threaten the head that I love.

The wind as an overt threat causes the reader to perceive a chilling atmosphere and a literal coldness. As in every allusion to the wind, the wind here also suggests the presence of the sinister and threatening Sidhe, but this reference to nature also indicates symbolically that ominous forces are present all around us.

Other poems contain similar wind references. In "He reproves the Curlew" (1896), the sound of a bird reminds Yeats of his beloved whom he misses:

> O, curlew, cry no more in the air,
> Or only to the water in the West;
> Because your crying brings to my mind
> Passion-dimmed eyes and long heavy hair
> That was shaken out over my breast:
> There is enough evil in the crying of the wind.

The speaker does not want to be reminded of his lost love and says he does not need additional pain since the wind itself is foreboding. At the same time, his focus on the wind serves to distract him from his sadness. In "He hears the Cry of

the Sedge" (1898), the wind "speaks" directly to the poet and tells him his loved one is unattainable:

> I wander by the edge
> Of this desolate lake
> Where wind cries in the sedge:
> Until the axle break
> That keeps the stars in their round,
> And hands hurl in the deep
> The banners of East and West,
> And the girdle of light is unbound,
> Your breast will not lie by the breast
> Of your beloved in sleep.

The poet sees his personal pain reflected in nature, but while the bird's cry and the wind are natural phenomena, his pain seems unnatural.

In some of Yeats's poems the dominant symbols are from myth rather than nature, but the figure of the wind is still present. In "The Secret Rose" (1896), Yeats integrates pagan and Christian symbols in his attempt to create a literary tradition indigenous to Ireland. He says he wants to develop a philosophy that,

> though made by many minds, would seem the work of a single mind, and turn our places of beauty or legendary association into holy symbols. I did not think this philosophy would be altogether pagan for it was plain that its symbols must be selected from all things that have moved men during many, mainly christian centuries (Autobiography 170).

Yeats states that "the Rose has been for many centuries a symbol of spiritual love and supreme beauty" (Poems 628). In addition to symbolizing "eternal beauty," it also symbolizes Ireland (Jeffares, Commentary 23). To Yeats, "the Rose . . . is

the rich unattainable focus of earthly dream, and in itself the embodiment of what is loveliest" (Thurley 19). "The Secret Rose" cites the "Holy Sepulchre, "the crowned Magi, and Christ ("Pierced hands and Rood of Elder") as well as Fand, Cuchulain, and Emer. The wind appears in the last section of the poem:

> I, too, await
> The hour of thy great wind of love and hate
> When shall the stars be blown about the sky,
> Like the sparks blown out of a smithy, and die?
> Surely thine hour is come, thy great wind blows,
> Far off, most secret, and inviolate Rose?

Jeffares states that "thy great wind . . . is probably a reference to the end of the world" (Commentary 67). The wind here is destructive as it will blow the stars about the sky, but this destruction also brings a new beginning. Yeats's statement about tragedy helps to clarify the dual action--destructive and constructive--of the wind. He says:

> The shaping joy has kept the sorrow pure, as it had kept it were the emotion love or hate, for the nobleness of the arts is the mingling of contraries, the extremity of sorrow, the extremity of joy, perfection of personality, the perfection of its surrender, overflowing turbulent energy, and marmorean stillness; and its red rose opens at the meeting place of the two beams of the cross, and at the trysting-place of mortal and immortal, time and eternity" (Essays 255).

While the wind is the embodiment of contraries in "The Secret Rose," it is sinister and ominous in "Red Hanrahan's Song about Ireland" (1894). It announces the coming of chaos:

> The old brown thorn-trees break in two high over Cummen Strand,
> Under a bitter black wind that blows from the left hand;
> Our courage breaks like an old tree in a black wind and dies,
> But we have hidden in our hearts the flame out of the eyes
> Of Cathleen, the daughter of Houlihan.

The wind is blowing from the left, traditionally the direction of foreboding and ill luck. This poem also exemplifies another powerful influence on Yeats--his unrequited love for Maud Gonne. "Once Yeats had seen and fallen in love with Maud Gonne . . . his poetic fate was sealed; she never left him in peace until he died" (Thurley 23). Yeats's love for Maud Gonne and his love for Ireland often overlap. The rose, symbol for Ireland, also signifies Maud Gonne. She is Ireland incarnate, "the embodiment of proud beauty" (Thurley 24). Yeats "associated her with the Countess Kathleen O'Shea, a woman of Irish legend who sacrificed her own soul to save others" (Kline 12). Yeats wrote the play "Cathleen ni Hoolihan" (1902) for Maud Gonne, who appeared in the title role. In the play Ireland is personified by "the traditional wronged old woman, calling on her children for help" (Jeffares, Plays 4). In "Red Hanrahan's Song about Ireland" (1894), Yeats transforms his love for Maud into love for Ireland. The next line, "The wind has bundled up the clouds high over Knocknarea," indicates that the wind is responsible for a coming disaster, literally a storm, but figuratively a force of general chaos in the world. The last verse of the poem offers salvation from the coming chaos:

> The yellow pool has overflowed highup on Clooth-na-Bare,
> For the wet winds are blowing our of the clinging air;

> Like heavy flooded waters our bodies and our blood;
> But purer than a tall candle before the Holy Rood
> Is Cathleen, the daughter of Houlihan.

Cathleen, the daughter of Houlihan, is Ireland, and Yeats affirms the strength of his Irish heritage. His Irish heritage will be the source of inspiration through the coming disaster. If we keep the love of Ireland alive in our hearts, we can survive the impending chaos. Dr. Samuel Kimball suggests that the "wind inspires a sublimating transfer of passion from Maud to his homeland." Even though Maud has rejected him and brought disruption to his life, he still loves her, and his feelings for her will continue to inspire his poetry just as his feelings for his country will carry him through the imminent disaster.

The wind, a part of nature man cannot control, emphasizes to Yeats man's general helplessness in the world. "He Thinks of his Past Greatness when a Part of the Constellation of Heaven" (1898), contains "bitterness and resentment against nature" (Adams 74). This poem deals with the sorrow Yeats feels when he realizes he cannot have Maud Gonne. Though he has been successful with his poetry, he is unable to win the woman he loves. The reality of this knowledge is devastating, and he expresses his feelings in the following lines:

> I became a man, a hater of the wind,
> Knowing one, out of all things, alone, that his head
> May not lie on the breast nor his lips on the hair
> Of the woman he loves, until he dies.
> O beast of the wilderness, bird of the air,
> Must I endure your amorous cries?

The poet realizes that it is just as impossible to earn the love of Maud as it is to conquer the wind. He identifies the wind "with his frustration both in love and in the search for knowledge and also in the attempt to join them" (Adams 74). A man cannot control natural forces like the wind just as he cannot control his feelings of love for a woman. The wind reminds him of the "uncomplicated sexuality of animals" versus "the complications of man's" (Adams 75). Therefore he resents his feeling of powerlessness and becomes a "hater of the wind"--a hater of what he cannot control.

In "He Thinks of his Past Greatness when a Part of the Constellations of Heaven," the poet is resentful of his failure, but in "Old Memory" (1904), however, he begins to accept what he cannot change. Jeffares remarks that "The Folly of being Comforted" (1902) "marks a newly emerging note of realism in Yeats's poetry" (Commentary 75). "Old Memory" expresses a similar attitude--sad, poignant acceptance of Maud's rejection:

> and who would have thought
> It all, and more than it all, would come to naught,
> And that dear words meant nothing?' But enough,
> For when we have blamed the wind we can blame love.

Yeats develops a parallel between the wind and love. Both are uncontrollable and natural, one in the physical atmosphere and the other in one's heart. Both can bring pleasure and pain. Love can cause heartbreak, and the wind can destroy the earth. Love can bring happiness, and the wind can be a cooling, pleasant breeze.

"The Withering of the Boughs" (1900) embodies the theme of the dream of the perfect love:

> I know of the sleepy country, where swans fly round
> Coupled with golden chains and sing as they fly.
> A king and queen are wandering there, and the sound
> Has made them so happy and hopeless, so deaf and so blind
> With wisdom, they wander till all the years have gone by.

Yeats's reference to the swans refers to Baile and Ailinn who became swans after they died of love for each other (Jeffares, Commentary 77). They symbolize perfect love. They are not only linked physically but spiritually as well because they have achieved wisdom. Once again, the image of the wind is associated with human desire, and the poem's refrain, "No boughs have withered because of the wintry wind; / The boughs have withered because I have told them my dreams," expresses Yeats's longing for the perfect love. Here human emotions are not only linked to the natural world, they overpower it. They cause the boughs to wither. Yeats feels his defeat in love so sharply that to him even the trees reflect his sorrow, or at least they ought to.

The wind stands for freedom in "Running to Paradise" (1913). Here the speaker dreams about escape from life and seeks rest in a paradise. The poem could be a fantasy, or it could be the statement of a madman who wants to drop out of life and live in a mythical paradise. The poem also carries the tone of a person at the end of his life who is headed toward an after-life or heaven. The refrain, "And there the king is but as the beggar," indicates a promising vision that

life in paradise will be different from that on earth. The poem contains references to life's instabilities and uncertainties such as "a poor life, do what he can," and "Poor men have grown to be rich men, / And rich men have grown dull." The solution to these problems according to the poem is "running to Paradise." The last stanza emphasizes the importance of the wind:

> The wind is old and still at play
> While I must hurry upon my way,
> For I am running to Paradise;
> Yet never have I lit on a friend
> To take my fancy like the wind
> That nobody can buy or bind:
>
> And there the king is but as the beggar.

Yeats's description of the wind as "old and still at play" stresses the hopeful view of the next life. Though old, the wind can still play. The wind, unlike man, remains free and unhampered by old age. Man must run to paradise to escape his infirmity while the wind is perpetually free. The wind, which is superior to all mortals, becomes a symbol of paradise.

The wind also exemplifies freedom in "The Fool by the Roadside" (1922), the theme of which is the frustration of earthly life compared to the peace of a spiritual existence:

> When cradle and spool are past
> And I mere shade at last
> Coagulate of stuff
> Transparent like the wind,
> I think that I may find
> A faithful love, a faithful love.

The poet implies that life has been disappointing and that he could not find an earthly love. The wind symbolizes the state when man is no longer a slave to his body. The wind itself knows no boundaries or confinement, so it is an appropriate metaphor for man's soul. One's breath, the difference between death and life, is also a type of wind. It is, however, a very delicate wind, and Yeats indicates that our lives are as fragile as the wind. Our lives can be blown about as easily as the breeze can blow a leaf.

Middle Poetry: The Search for Order in the Midst of Chaos

By "Responsibilities" (1914), Yeats's sense of wandering that was prevalent in the early poetry has shifted to a search for wisdom. Instead of just desiring peace and escape from life's pain, he seeks knowledge about the world and his place in it. His themes have progressed from physical love and aimless wandering and longing to a search for something more lasting--wisdom. Jeffares states, "These poems are the opposite of his earlier love poetry; they show him withering into truth . . . because the past and present have no future" (CA 89). His earlier wandering poems are precursors to his later wisdom-seeking poems. Nature imagery, including that of the wind, is still prominent in Yeats's middle poetry. In some poems Yeats associates wisdom with nature, and a place of spiritual enlightenment often appears as a windy summit or desolate windswept area. In the poetry of Yeats's middle period, the wind may also symbolize a driving force as opposed to a restless, aimless force. At times Yeats calls the wind "bitter" and presents it as a reflection of Ireland's internal chaos. The wind may also appear as a harbinger of destruction and underscore the powerlessness of mankind.

"The Three Hermits" (1913) is among the poems in which Yeats associates wisdom with nature. In this poem three old hermits by the "cold and desolate sea" discuss the meaning of life. Actually, the conversation is only between two of

them as the third, who is sitting "on a windy stone," only sings "unnoticed like a bird." The implication is that the third hermit, "giddy with his hundredth year," is wise enough to accept life and has transcended the stage in which he feels he must analyze it. The windy stone acts as the seat of wisdom. In "The Hour before Dawn" (1914), the seat of wisdom is a "windy place." In this poem a beggar, while looking for a place to spend the night, "stumble[s] upon that windy place / Called Cruachen" and discovers a man sleeping his life away in "a dark deep hollow in the rock." The sleeping man says that:

> all life longs for the Last Day
> And there's no man but cocks his ear
> To know when Michael's trumpet cries
> That flesh and bone may disappear.

He has been hiding to avoid unpleasantries in life and waiting for them to disappear. The beggar realizes it is never safe to come out of hiding because life will never be trouble-free, but he also understands that one should participate in life and not waste it waiting for perfection. The fact that the hour of illumination occurs right before dawn is significant. Unterecker says that "Yeats's favorite moment of perception [is] daybreak" (237). Dawn brings the morning light and announces a new day, and the beggar gains a new appreciation of life as "the clouds [are] brightening with the dawn."

The origin of the windy place is most likely Cruachen, the ancient capital of Connacht and home of the legendary king and queen, Ailell and Maëve (637). In A Treasury of Irish Myth, Legend, and Folklore, Lady Augusta Gregory

describes Cruachen as "the Royal house of Ailell and of Maeve, that some called Cruachen of the poets . . . . And besides this, there was at Cruachen the Hill of the Sidhe, or, as some called it, the cave of Cruachen . . . and it is there the people of the Sidhe lived; but it is seldom any living person had the power to see them" (493-494). So Cruachen is associated with the Sidhe which humans cannot see, and since the Sidhe travel in the wind, Cruachen is a windy place. Yeats refers to this knowledge in "The Hour before Dawn" as he identifies Cruachen as the place "where long years ago / Queen Maeve's nine Maines had been nursed," the Maines being the children of Maeve and Ailell (Poems 637). The beggar in "The Hour before Dawn" and the hermits in "The Three Hermits" are susceptible to natural elements such as the wind, as well as the supernatural, as the windy places are associated with the Sidhe. The beggar seeks shelter, and the three hermits are prey to the wind "by a cold desolate sea." It is in this exposed state that they are at home in nature and with themselves and are in touch with their primal instincts. They feel the influence of ancient Ireland and the natural world. In discussing the influence of beggars and hermits in his essay, "Magic," Yeats links them to barbarians of former times:

> We cannot doubt that barbaric people receive such influences more visibly and obviously, and in all likelihood more easily and fully than we do, for our life in cities, which deafens or kills the passive meditative life, and our education that enlarges the separated, self-moving mind, have made our souls less sensitive. Our souls that were once naked to the wind of heaven are now thickly clad (Essays 41).

The beggars, says Unterecker, provide the poet with "a reservoir of energy and imagery" (122). They are outside the social order and display the "uninhibited language and the gaiety and recklessness of behavior" the artist needs for inspiration (Unterecker 122).

"Paudeen" (1914) is another poem in which the poet receives enlightenment through nature:

> Indignant at the fumbling wits, the obscure spite
> Of our old Paudeen in his shop, I stumbled blind
> Among the stones and thorn-trees, under morning light;
> Until a curlew cried and in the luminous wind
> A curlew answered; and suddenly thereupon I thought
> That on the lonely height where all are in God's eye,
> There cannot be, confusion of our sound forgot,
> A single soul that lacks a sweet crystalline cry.

The word "Paudeen" refers to Ireland's "new middle class" who have shown "how base at moments of excitement are minds without culture" (Poems 594). The natural world--the wind, the stones, the trees, the dawn--form the source of wisdom here. The speaker, though neither beggar nor hermit, experiences illumination through the natural world as the beggars and hermits do. He refers to himself as blind when he looks down on Paudeen, but the luminous wind is the means through which he understands that all Ireland is united in spirit through its windy places, as is all humanity. He experiences a clarification of values and sees the beauty of the human spirit reflected in nature. As "order replaces chaos" and "blindness gives way to vision," remarks Unterecker, "the artist--doomed to defeat

in a civilization dominated by Paudeens--necessarily triumphs . . . and secretly exults in the glory of his private vision" (119).

In "To a Wealthy Man who promised a second Subscription to the Dublin Municipal Gallery if it were proved the People wanted Pictures" (1913), art and nature interact as Yeats uses the word "windy" to describe the source of aesthetic appreciation. This poem deals with the value of art which Yeats, at times, espouses as the means by which we eventually achieve wisdom. The main idea of the poem is how those who appreciate art have a responsibility to share this appreciation with everyone, even those who profess to have no desire to be exposed to artistic values--the Paudeens of the world. Here Yeats associates art with courtesy, an honorable way of living and thinking, and the appreciation of aesthetics. Yeats states:

> And Guidobaldo, when he made
> That grammar school of courtesies
> Where wit and beauty learned their trade
> Upon Urbino's windy hill
> Had sent no runners to and fro
> That he might learn the shepherd's will.

"Urbino's windy hill" symbolizes the source of the aesthetic values that enrich us individually and collectively.

"[The boughs of the hazel shake]" (1917) contains a conflict between the wind as a driving force in life and a restless, aimless force. This poem is a dialogue between two musicians. Yeats expresses the idea that life is a continual quest for meaning in the lines:

'Why should I sleep?' the heart cries,
For the wind, the salt wind, the sea wind,
Is beating a cloud through the skies;
I would wander always like the wind.

The next section states that searching for something illusive is useless and implies that one should be content with what one has:

'O wind, O salt wind, O sea wind!'
Cries the heart, 'it is time to sleep;
Why wander and nothing to find?
Better grow old and sleep.'

Whether the wind has purpose or wanders aimlessly, it is an active force, an example of nature's power. Yeats compares the heart to the wind. Yeats tells us the heart wants peace as well as activity: "The heart would be always awake, / The heart would turn to its rest." These opposing statements represent contraries in life. Should we be active or passive? Should we take a risk and face the possibility of disappointment, or should we take the safe path and lead a commonplace existence?

The sleeping man in "The Hour before Dawn" is the opposite of Robert Gregory in "In Memory of Major Robert Gregory" (1918) which deals with the untimely death of a young man as well as the value of life in general. While the hermit hides from life and waits for problems to disappear instead of enjoying what he has, Robert Gregory experiences life to the fullest. Yeats comments on Robert Gregory's appreciation of nature and the world in general:

> For all things the delighted eye now sees
> Were loved by him; the old storm-broken trees
> That cast their shadows upon road and bridge;
> The tower set on the stream's edge
> The ford where drinking cattle make a stir
> Nightly . . .

Yeats expresses his personal feelings and thoughts in this poem, and "at the same time the occasion and the characters acquire a symbolic public significance" (Auden 350). While Yeats mourns Gregory's death, he presents him to himself and others as an example of "life's epitome":

> Some burn damp faggots, others may consume
> The entire combustible world in one small room
> As though dried straw, and if we turn about
> The bare chimney is gone black out
> Because the work had finished in that flare.
> Soldier, scholar, horseman, he,
> As 'twere all life's epitome.
> What made us dream that he could comb grey hair?

Yeats's line at the beginning of the next stanza, "I had thought, seeing how bitter is that wind / That shakes the shutter," reflects his sadness and confusion at the death of this young man. Yeats is perhaps somewhat bitter, as he is suffering the loss of a friend, and the bitter wind also helps him to reflect upon his own insignificant position in the world. The external force--the bitter wind--is just as unexplainable as Robert Gregory's death.

The bitter wind continues to blow in Yeats's poetry, as Geoffrey Thurley's quote of Yeats's comments on the section, "The Tower" (1928), indicates. In a letter he wrote to Olivia Shakespeare in 1928, Yeats said, "I was astonished at its

bitterness, and long to live out of Ireland that I may find some new vintage. Yet that bitterness gave the book its power" (Thurley 122). Thurley states, "The poetry of . . . the early and middle nineteen-twenties, represents a particularly intense and tragic phase of the poet's total oeuvre" (122).

In "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen" (1919) images of art as well as nature reflect the chaotic state of Yeats's Ireland:

> Many ingenious lovely things are gone
> That seemed sheer miracle to the multitude,
> Protected from the circle of the moon
> That pitches common things about. There stood
> Amid the ornamental bronze stone
> An ancient image made of olive wood
> And gone are Phidias' famous ivories
> And all the golden grasshoppers and bees.

Here Yeats's references to the "image made of olive wood," a statue of Athena on the Acropolis built around 421-407 B.C., and to Phidias, the Greek sculptor (490-432 B.C.) who carved statues of Athena and Zeus (Poems 650), emphasize that art which seemed eternal is also susceptible to change. This poem deals with the decay of civilization and the crumbling of society. Yeats's description of society--"Now days are dragon-ridden, the nightmare / Rides upon sleep"--reflects the specific incident of the Irish civil war which serves as a springboard for his statements on mankind in general. "Those winds that clamour of approaching of night" are ominous messengers that blow tidings of destruction to man who had thought the world was at peace but realizes he was only dreaming. Yeats comments on the folly of man's dreams in the following passage:

O, but we dreamed to mend
Whatever mischief seemed
To afflict mankind, but now
That winds of winter blow
Learn that we were crack-pated when we dreamed.

Not only are man's dreams full of vain hopes, but, as Thurley says, "the perception of this human powerlessness leads Yeats to conceive of civilization as itself simply another dream" (128).

The wind announces the downfall of order, or of what we thought was order. The wind brings reality:

Come let us mock at the great
That had such burdens on the mind
And toiled so hard and late
To leave some monument behind,
Nor thought of the levelling wind.

Man has ignored the natural world and focused on "his own secret meditation" and has thus become "lost amid the labyrinth that he has made / In art or politics." He has been oblivious to the power of the wind and his own insignificance in the universe. Yeats even acknowledges that his own work could be torn down, mocked, and reduced to nothing. His dream was to put down on paper in words "his own secret meditation," but now he realizes "the half-imagined, the half-written page" decays when the "winds of winter blow."

"Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen" deals with the power of nature over man, which necessarily includes the process of aging. The wind accentuates the frailty of man:

> Come let us mock at the good
> That fancied goodness might be gay,
> And sick of solitude
> Might proclaim a holiday:
> Wind shrieked - and where are they?

Not only is man powerless against the natural world, even from within society he is powerless. The "foul storm" symbolizes evil in the world as well as the driving force that propels us to strive to fight this evil and to survive in the midst of it. Yeats says that the "good, wise, or great" attempt "to bar that foul storm out." At the poem's end Yeats adds to the destructive, levelling wind the sinister reference to the return of the Sidhe and Herodias' daughters:

> Herodias' daughters have returned again,
> A sudden blast of dusty wind and after
> Thunder of feet, tumult of images,
> Their purpose in the labyrinth of the wind.

The wind symbolizes both fairies who bring evil to man and Herodias' daughters who perform the dance of death. "[This] poem is a lamentation culminating in a vision of mindless horror not balanced by the opposite" (Adams 165). The wind blows down civilization and carries mankind off into oblivion just as in the ancient Irish legends the Sidhe steal humans and take them into the fairy world.

As in "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen," the wind in "A Prayer for my Daughter" (1921) represents threatening forces that constitute a challenge or hardship in life. In the physical setting of the poem, the wind refers to an actual storm:

Once more the storm is howling, and half hid
Under this cradle-hood and coverlid
My child sleeps on. There is no obstacle
But Gregory's wood and one bare hill
Whereby the haystack- and roof-levelling wind,
Bred on the Atlantic, can be stayed;
And for an hour I have walked and prayed
Because of the great gloom that is in my mind.

While a storm rages outside, Yeats observes his infant daughter and contemplates her future. The wind is both literal and symbolic. Besides the elemental force which "scream[s] upon the tower, / And under the elms above the flooded stream," the wind stands for forces in life which may cause trouble for his daughter and jeopardize her future. The strength of the wind parallels danger in life--specifically in the life of Yeats's daughter but also in that of mankind in general. While "walk[ing] and pray[ing] for this young child," Yeats hears "the sea-wind scream upon the tower, / And under the arches of the bridge, and scream / In the elms above the flooded stream." Simultaneously, he is "Imagining in excited reverie / That the future years had come, / Dancing to a frenzied drum, / Out of the murderous innocence of the sea." The wind and his vision of the future are equally threatening. The wind has great power to produce change. It is "haystack- and roof-levelling," and threatens to bring all society to the same level--a level of commonness. It literally threatens the roof on Yeats's home, and it symbolizes the threat to society of a force that seeks to destroy its values.

While destructive, the wind also represents a driving force in life. It is stimulating in the sense that the threat of destruction produces a reaction, a

challenge, and a renewal of the will to survive. It is in the midst of possible destruction that Yeats is able to conceive his desire for his daughter's future. He says:

> My mind, because the minds that I have loved,
> The sort of beauty that I have approved,
> Prosper but little, has dried up of late,
> Yet knows that to be choked with hate
> May well be of all evil chances chief.
> If there's no hatred in a mind
> Assault and battery of the wind
> Can never tear the linnet from the leaf.
>
> An intellectual hatred is the worst,
> So let her think opinions are accursed.
> Have I not seen the loveliest woman born
> Out of the mouth of Plenty's horn,
> Because of her opinionated mind
> Barter that horn and every good
> By quiet natures understood
> For an old bellows full of angry wind?

The external threat of the wind stimulates his thoughts and makes him aware of possible dangers such as jealousy, an unhappy marriage, fanaticism, and hatred. In his statement, "If there's no hatred in a mind / Assault and battery of the wind / Can never tear a linnet from the leaf," Yeats subordinates the wind's power to the power of steadfastness and tradition. He says external forces cannot overpower internal stability, though they may appear to do so. Obviously, a strong wind can blow a bird from a leaf, but Yeats uses this metaphor to stress that inner values are ultimately stronger than external forces such as societal pressures or an "opinionated mind." The wind can be "a blast of air artificially

produced, e.g. by bellows" (OED 365), and "empty talk, vain or ineffectual speech" (OED 367) which lacks meaning and importance. "An old bellows full of angry wind" represents Ireland's political fanatics generally and Maud Gonne specifically, who exchanged her Horn of Plenty for a wind instrument "with which she lectures the world" (Unterecker 167). Yeats values "radical innocence" rather than the "arrogance and hatred . . . / Peddled in the thoroughfares." He says his daughter can, "though every face should scowl / And every windy quarter howl / Or every bellows burst, be happy still." Yeats's last lines of the poem, "How but in custom and ceremony / Are innocence and beauty born?" indicate the importance of custom and tradition which ultimately will survive in spite of the angry wind.

Later Poetry: The Quest for Spiritual Renewal

As Yeats grows older, he becomes more aware of uncontrollable natural forces, the process of aging being one of them. Yeats is hampered by his aging body which he resents, and he searches for something unchanging and dependable. Nature signifies change, whereas art for Yeats signifies the static and the eternal. Nature imagery is less frequent in his later poetry, as he turns for inspiration from nature to art. Yeats's later poetry reflects his frustration at aging, as well as the uproar and confusion caused by Ireland's civil war. Themes in his later poetry include intellectual ancestry, the permanence of art, and art's influential power as the conveyor of values. Though the wind plays a much smaller role in Yeats's later poetry, it does appear occasionally. At times it reflects Yeats's anxiety about death. At other times, while the wind appears threatening, it also represents activity and life.

The group of poems, "The Tower" (1928), announces a shift in focus in Yeats's poetry which begins to look to art as a source of wisdom and as something which will provide a legacy. Yeats is growing more aware of the influence of his art on his readers, and he looks back at his ancestors for inspiration for his efforts to establish something eternal for future generations. He describes his viewpoint concerning art in his essay, "A General Introduction For My Work":

> A poet writes always of his personal life, in his finest work out of its tragedy, whatever it be, remorse, lost love, or mere loneliness; he never speaks directly as to someone at the breakfast table, there is always a phantasmagoria . . . . He has been reborn as an idea, something intended, complete" (Essays 509).

A poet's own experiences, says Yeats, must form the substance of his work, but if the poet is to communicate to the reader, the poet must be detached from his poetry and from his emotions. For Yeats, art serves as the system through which he organizes his thoughts, feelings, desires, and disappointments, and through which he achieves an understanding of the complexities, especially the contradictions, in life. He seeks through art a clarification of values. Art is "something intended, complete." In discussing his poetic philosophy in "A General Introduction for my Work," Yeats says:

> No actress ever sobbed when she played Cleopatra . . . . The supernatural is present, cold winds blow across our hands, upon our faces . . . . There may be in this or that detail painful tragedy, but in the whole work none. I have heard Lady Gregory say . . . 'Tragedy must be a joy to the man who dies.' Nor is it different with lyrics, songs, narrative poems; neither scholars nor the populace have sung or read anything generation after generation because of its pain" (Essays 523).

"Meditations in Time of Civil War" (1922-1923), a collection of poems within the section, "The Tower," reflects Yeats's anxiety and his search for something steadfast in this time of chaos. He looks to his ancestors, those who provided him a literary heritage as well as blood relations, for inspiration. The subject of "My Table" is a ceremonial Japanese sword that was given to Yeats by

Junzo Sato in March 1920 (Poems 649):

> Two heavy trestles, and a board
> Where Sato's gift, a changeless sword,
> By pen and paper lies,
> That it may moralise
> My days out of their aimlessness.

The sword, a symbol of eternity, inspires Yeats to write poetry: ". . . In Sato's house, / Curved like new moon, moon-luminous, / It lay five hundred years." The sword was in existence long before his lifetime, and he honors the sword because it represents history and tradition. According to Adams, the sword represents "a unified culture that embodied simplicity, ritual, and a tradition of artistry passed on from father to son" (162). Yeats describes the process of artistic creation:

> only an aching heart
> Conceives a changeless work of art.
> Our learned men have urged
> That when and where 'twas forged
> A marvelous accomplishment,
> In painting or in poetry, went
> From father unto son
> And through the centuries ran
> And seemed unchanging like the sword.

Skill passed from generation to generation fashioned the sword, an object of art, and "a marvelous accomplishment," which, in turn, passes on the skill to succeeding generations. The soul's beauty is reflected in the object of art because love of the art went into making it, and the sword will preserve the soul's beauty.

Previously, as in the poem "Paudeen," Yeats had noticed the soul's beauty reflected in nature, but now a sword, a gift of love from a friend, becomes the embodiment of the spirit, not only because of the meaning it holds for Yeats in view of the man who gave it to him, but also because of its history. It represents tradition and unchanging values. The sword was made by a mortal man, someone with "an aching heart." But because it is itself immortal and changeless, it becomes the instrument of a legacy of the skill and art and love by which is was fashioned.

Yeats's home symbolizes eternity in the poem "My Descendants" (1922-23). Here Yeats contemplates the future of his children as well as that of generations to come:

> Having inherited a vigorous mind
> From my old fathers, I must nourish dreams
> And leave a woman and a man behind
> As vigorous of mind.

He is concerned that his descendants may not appreciate or live up to their heritage and that the values from his ancestors, which he feels he is responsible for maintaining, may die. His statement, "And what if my descendants lose the flower / Through natural declension of the soul," echoes Ireland's turmoil. Though the future of his family as well as that of Ireland is uncertain, Yeats does assert some hope at the close of this poem:

> And I, that count myself most prosperous,
> Seeing that love and friendship are enough,

> For an old neighbor's friendship chose the house
> And decked and altered it for a girl's love,
> And know whatever flourish and decline
> These stones remain their monument and mine.

The stones of his house symbolize stability. In the midst of turmoil, Yeats recognizes the importance of his past and states that nothing can take away what he has built in his heart.

In "The Stare's Nest by My Window" (1922-23), also written during the Irish civil war, Yeats turns to nature for comfort and diversion. He says, "One felt an overmastering desire not to grow unhappy or embittered, not to lose all sense of the beauty of nature" (Jeffares Commentary 228). Adams describes the poem as "a prayer for creativity and peace, a return to what might be regarded as a benevolent, natural cyclicity opposed to the destructive war going on in the countryside around the tower" (163-164):

> The bees build in the crevices
> Of the loosening masonry, and there
> The mother birds bring grubs and flies.
> My wall is loosening; honey-bees,
> Come build in the empty house of the stare.

The poet "identifies himself with the tower . . . and includes himself in the cycle of decline" (Adams 164). The abandoned starling's nest, seemingly useless, becomes the potential home for honey bees, as "Yeats invites the bees to bind these crumbling fragments together" (Thurley 138). Young comments that "'loosening masonry' and the decay of civilization may produce a corresponding greatness in

the imagination . . . . Impersonal natural forces have been invoked to remind us that creation and destruction finally interlock" (39-40).

Though Young makes the above statement in reference to "The Stare's Nest by My Window," it applies equally to the next poem, "I see Phantoms of Hatred and of the Heart's Fullness and of the Coming Emptiness." In this poem nature is no longer comforting but rather the cause of confusion:

> I climb to the tower-top and lean upon broken stone,
> A mist that is like blown snow is sweeping over all,
> Valley, river, and elms, under the light of a moon
> That seems unlike itself, that seems unchangeable,
> A glittering sword out of the east. A puff of wind
> And those white glimmering fragments of the mist sweep by.
> Frenzies bewilder, reveries perturb the mind;
> Monstrous familiar images swim to the mind's eye.

The wind-blown mist over the natural world parallels the mist of confusion in Yeats's mind as he realizes that what he thought was steadfast is changing. The crumbling of his tower reflects the state of the war-torn society. Yeats's home is disintegrating as is the country. Both are subject to impersonal natural forces. At the top of the tower in the misty moonlight, the poet has a vision similar to that of hermit and beggars in previous poems; he experiences "frenzies," "reveries," and "monstrous familiar images." In the midst of the haze, Yeats finds as a consolation that "the abstract joys / The half-read wisdom of daemonic images, / Suffice the ageing man as once the growing boy." "Youth-age differences [become] superficial, even illusory" (Young 44), and Yeats looks to inner images

and joys gained from his search for knowledge as "an affirmation of the self-sufficiency of the poetic imagination" (Young 44).

In the poem "The Tower" (1925), Yeats cries out at the unfairness of old age. He looks back on his literary accomplishments and tries to put his life into perspective. He expresses the realization that all living things die, but avows that in the meantime he will nourish his soul as long as he can by "Compelling it to study / In a learned school." He accepts his approaching death in this poem and acknowledges that everything once living will eventually "Seem but the clouds of the sky / When the horizon fades; / Or a bird's sleepy cry / Among the deepening shades."

"Sailing to Byzantium" (1926) illustrates the concept of immortalizing spiritual beauty through art. David Young comments that this poem deals with "the restless entrapment of the human spirit in an imperfect material world, and the artist's priestly role in ministering to the needs of that spirit and aiding in its liberation" (16). In the first verse of "Sailing to Byzantium," Yeats acknowledges his feelings of alienation from the world of youth and presents the contrast between intellectual achievement and sensual pleasure:

> That is no country for old men. The young
> In one another's arms, birds in the trees,
> --Those dying generations--at their song,
> The salmon-falls, the mackerel-crowded seas,
> Fish, flesh, or fowl, commend all summer long
> Whatever is begotten, born, and dies.
> Caught in that sensual music all neglect
> Monuments of unageing intellect.

The creatures of the natural world--"the young in one another's arms, . . . Fish, flesh, or fowl"--are all unaware of the passing of time as they are all under the influence of the senses. They are living lives of pleasure, day-to-day existences, and are oblivious to the future. Yeats knows, though, that these creatures too will eventually face the ravages of time; they are "those dying generations." These creatures are unaware of their mortality, and they have no concern for preserving themselves as they have not yet realized that they are dying. Only the old understand their "mortal dress." Yeats expresses his feelings of helplessness in an ironic fashion. He says that these vibrantly living creatures are dying in order to bring attention to the fact that all nature changes and dies. A younger poet would perhaps not be so focused on the process of dying but rather on that of living. Hazard Adams questions whether this "poem is of visionary ecstasy or deliberate self-encouragement" (148). Does Yeats believe that the young are disadvantaged in their ignorance, or is he trying to convince himself that an aged man, though wise, is better off?

In the next stanza Yeats offers a brighter view of the dying world and his place in it:

> An aged man is but a paltry thing,
> A tattered coat upon a stick, unless
> Soul clap its hands and sing, and louder sing
> For every tatter in its mortal dress,
> Nor is there singing school but studying
> Monuments of its own magnificence;
> And therefore I have sailed the seas and come
> To the holy city of Byzantium.

The aged still appear as pitiful and useless, but some salvation exists for them. Their souls rather than bodies can now emerge as happy and victorious; they can "sing." By looking to art, "monuments of its own magnificence," the soul can live forever. One can "escape from the world of change to a singing school of spiritual rapture on the threshold of eternity" (Young 18). Yeats turns to the ancient culture of Byzantium, a center of art and religion, for inspiration. Yeats says:

> I think that in early Byzantium, maybe never before or since in recorded history, religious, aesthetic and practical life were one, that architect and artificers . . . spoke to the multitude and the few alike. The painter, the mosaic worker, the worker in gold and silver, the illuminator of sacred books, were almost impersonal, almost perhaps without the consciousness of individual design, absorbed in their subject-matter and that the vision of a whole people" (Jeffares Commentary 212).

Yeats says that since "Byzantium was the centre of European civilisation and the source of its spiritual philosophy . . . [he] symbolize[s] the search for the spiritual life by a journey to that city" (Jeffares Commentary 213). Though Yeats uses the name of an actual place for his spiritual refuge, Byzantium in this poem is really a state of mind. It is the "heaven of the man's mind," according to R.P. Blackmur, where "the mind or soul dwells in eternal or miraculous form; there all things are possible because all things are known to the soul" (60). Elder Olson says it "signif[ies] a state of contemplation wherein the soul studies itself and so learns both what it is and in what consists true and eternal joy" (297).

In the third verse of the poem Yeats expresses the desire for the soul to be free from bodily imprisonment:

O sages standing in God's holy fire
As in the gold mosaic of a wall,
Come from the holy fire, perne in a gyre,
And be the singing-masters of my soul.
Consume my heart away; sick with desire
And fastened to a dying animal
It knows not what it is; and gather me
Into the artifice of eternity.

Yeats is full of "a passionate longing to be rid of the burdens of old age and mortality, [and] to merge with a world of artistic and eternal perfection" (Young 18). He wants the soul to transcend the body and live in the eternity that is expressed in art. Young describes this stanza as a prayer but says, "the fact that the sages seem to be part of a splendid mosaic" indicates that the speaker is seeking a "paradise . . . associated more with aesthetic than religious rewards" (17).

In the last stanza of the poem Yeats rejects nature for art:

Once out of nature I shall never take
My bodily form from any natural thing,
But such a form as Grecian goldsmiths make
Of hammered gold and gold enamelling
To keep a drowsy Emperor awake;
Or set upon a golden bough to sing
To lords and ladies of Byzantium
Of what is past, or passing, or to come.

Young points out that this "idealizing [of] civilization as against nature" makes this poem "a curious kind of antipastoral" (17). Yeats seeks a form that will not die. Here art becomes the way for a tattered body to transform itself into a soul whose beauty becomes eternal through art. Yeats's "artifice of eternity," says Joseph

Warren Beach, is "the world of pure ideas" (219). The body dies and decays, but the soul lives through art. Young states that this poem "is about the relation between artist and work of art. The latter can be perfect and changeless, while the former is subject to decay and mortality" (17). Art is a reflection of man's soul, and art gives substance to it. Though Yeats seems to reach closure at the end of this poem, Hazard Adams believes that "Sailing to Byzantium" is not "a triumphant conclusion" but rather an "antithetical conclusion, . . . a going-on, a process that never yields the contentment of triumph" because "from the antithetical point of view triumph yields stasis and is self-defeating" (151).

In "A Dialogue of Self and Soul" (1927) Yeats rejects the self-illumination and wisdom of old age and desires to be part of the world. He says, "And what's the good of an escape / If honour find him in the wintry blast?" He rejects the "wintry blast." This poem contradicts "Sailing to Byzantium" since the speaker desires to remain in the world rather than be out of it. He "embrac[es] renewal against annihilation" (Adams 185-186) and says:

> I am content to live it all again
> And yet again, if it be life to pitch
> Into the frog-spawn of a blind man's ditch,
> A blind man battering blind men; . . .
>
> I am content to follow to its source
> Every event in action or in thought;
> Measure the lot; forgive myself the lot!
> So great a sweetness flows into the breast
> We must laugh and we must sing,
> We are blest by everything,
> Everything we look upon is blest.

He desires life, even its unpleasant aspects, as "joy [is] derived from the recollection of all his life, absurdities and all" (Thurley 187).

In "Blood and the Moon" (1927), Yeats praises the value of his intellectual ancestry. He contemplates the tower he has made into his home and draws a parallel between various towers--Alexandria's, Babylon's, Shelley's, and his--and his ancestral line, not in the sense of blood relations but intellectual kindred:

> Alexandria's was a beacon tower, and Babylon's
> An image of the moving heavens, a log-book of the sun's journey
> and the moon's;
> And Shelley had his towers, thought's crowned powers he called
> them once.
>
> I declare this tower is my symbol; I declare
> This winding, gyring, spiring treadmill of a stair is my ancestral stair;
> That Goldsmith and the Dean, Berkeley and Burke have travelled
> there.

Goldsmith, Swift, Berkeley, and Burke are his Anglo-Irish literary forefathers whose works serve as models and inspiration. Unterecker describes them as "articulating intellect and passion, . . . defining the state and the nature of God" (206), and Adams describes them as being "dissatisfied with the world as commonly seen" and inventing "a powerful metaphor through the vision of which the world is changed (189). Here Yeats proclaims art as a link between generations, a necessary means of connecting mankind in a segmented world. Art is the piece of the puzzle that completes the picture of mankind; it is the thread by which generations are stitched together.

As Yeats strives to attain wisdom, his poems reflect this desire as well as

his intellectual maturation. An interesting comment on the emergence of wisdom occurs in "After Long Silence" (1929) in which Yeats compares old age and youth:

> Speech after long silence; it is right,
> All other lovers being estranged or dead,
> Unfriendly lamplight hid under its shade,
> The curtains drawn upon unfriendly night,
> That we descant and yet again descant
> Upon the supreme theme of Art and Song:
> Bodily decrepitude is wisdom; young
> We loved each other and were ignorant.

Here Yeats's statement that "bodily decrepitude is wisdom" signifies that he has gained knowledge about life through the years a young person has not yet experienced. Insightful contemplations have replaced youthful passions. Ironically, though, Yeats's affirmation of wisdom gained through aging may reflect the fact that he no longer has his youthful passion rather than his preference for wisdom over passion.

A comparison between this poem and "Crazy Jane on the Day of Judgment" (1930) reveals an interesting contrast:

> 'Love is all
> Unsatisfied
> That cannot take the whole
> Body and soul';
> And that is what Jane said.

Crazy Jane "has lived the completely female, completely primary life" (Kline 47). Her "'insanity' is the wisdom of the natural man" (Houghton 375). She and the speaker in "After Long Silence" are both looking back on their younger days.

Crazy Jane, reflecting on her past experiences in physical love, states that in order for love to be complete, the body and soul must be given and received. Love consists of a balance between the physical and spiritual. Robert Langbaum comments that Jane "speaks for the healthy life of the instincts which Christianity forces underground. It is a sign of society's derangement that her position . . . [is] put into the mouth of a 'crazy' speaker" (94). The character of Jane echoes Yeats's comment that "the tragedy of sexual intercourse is the perpetual virginity of the souls" (Jeffares Commentary 309). In "After Long Silence" the two former lovers no longer enjoy physical pleasures but rather "descant and yet again descant / Upon the supreme theme of Art and Song." One wonders if now their souls are no longer virginal. Have these souls experienced consummation and union? The unspoken answer is "yes," though again one notices Yeats's irony since he has no choice in choosing the union of souls rather than bodies at this point in his life. He calls himself "ignorant," though he probably did not think himself ignorant when he and his former lover--now platonic friend-- were physically involved. He is most likely acknowledging both his youthful ignorance and his present impotence. The implication here is that one can have either spiritual or physical fulfillment, not both simultaneously, like Crazy Jane believes.

In "Those Dancing Days are Gone" (1929), wisdom manifests itself in freedom--freedom to be oneself:

> I thought it out this very day,
> Noon upon the clock,
> A man may put pretence away

Who leans upon a stick,
May sing, and sing until he drop,
Whether to maid or hag:
I carry the sun in a gold cup,
The moon in a silver bag.

According to Yeats, an aged man, though an unpleasant sight, has had his youthful illusions shattered and is able to look at life objectively. He can "put pretence away" and not be concerned about others' opinions because he has lived long enough to know that the judgments of others are temporary and fickle. He can transcend the mundane. He knows lasting truth is found within oneself, and he can broadcast this truth or joy of the soul through singing--poetry, the "foul body" being insignificant.

Yeats's later poems reflect his anxiety about growing older, and his desire to attain freedom from the liability of old age is foremost in his mind. "Mad as the Mist and Snow" (1933) contains the same threatening wind that appeared in earlier poems:

Bolt and bar the shutter
For the foul winds blow.
Our minds are at their best this night,
And I seem to know
That everything outside us is
Mad as the mist and snow.

While the speaker desires protection from the storm, he also must deal with the fact that he is separated from the active world by his old age. Though the wind appears threatening, it also represents activity and life.

In "Three Marching Songs" (1933-1934) Yeats voices his anxiety about death. The refrain in the first song, "All that is finished, let it fade," indicates a resigned acceptance of life. Tragic joy is absent here. Yeats seeks some meaning to life and wonders:

> What if there's nothing up there at the top?
> Where are the captains that govern mankind?
> What tears down a tree that has nothing within it?
> A blast of wind, O a marching wind,
> March wind, and any old tune,
> March march and how does it run.

The wind in this poem emphasizes that we are under the power of nature. This poem offers a gloomy picture of life in which no force exists to redeem us from meaningless. Yeats seems to disregard his previous affirmations of art as a link among men and between the temporal and the eternal.

In "Meru" (1934), Yeats speaks about the fragility of civilization and impermanence of man. Man, "despite his terror, cannot cease / Ravening through century after century, / Ravening, raging, and uprooting that he may come / Into the desolation of reality." As Jeffares comments, "The poem envisages man as a destroyer of what he creates" (Commentary 358). Civilization seems doomed:

> Egypt and Greece good-bye, and good-bye, Rome!
> Hermits upon Mount Meru or Everest,
> Caverned in night under the drifted snow,
> Or where that snow and winter's dreadful blast
> Beat down upon their naked bodies, know
> That day brings round the night, that before dawn
> His glory and his monuments are gone.

People are caught up in an unending cycle in which nothing lasts. Only the hermits realize the hopelessness of this circle. They are at peace with nature and naked to the world. Their souls as well as their bodies are uncovered. They see what civilized man cannot. They know that "all man's relentless pursuit both of things and of wisdom [is] finally meaningless" (Unterecker 253). The hopeful note implied in this poem is that if man can become aware of himself and the meaningless events in his life, he can possibly transform these mundane events into more significant ones. "Winter's dreadful blast" makes one aware and wakes one from the sameness and dullness and complacency of society and the eternal cycle. We are continually building, tearing down, and rebuilding. We cannot escape unless we bare ourselves to "winter's dreadful blast." We must remove our coverings of complacency so we can experience illumination of the soul like the hermits on the mountain.

As Yeats grows older, he attempts to reconcile himself with approaching death. Thurley observes that "the last period of a great writer often seems to be characterized by a certain detachment from the materialities of Life--those of body, time, and society. There is a characteristic deepening of perspective, a feeling of the religious . . . Death assumes, now that it has come closer, a less terrible aspect" (163). While Yeats stated in "Meru" that all things are meaningless, in "New Poems" he says that "the man who comprehends the meaningless designs has achieved the most that can be accomplished in life" (Unterecker 255). Yeats's search for wisdom continues, and the concept of tragic

joy appears as an important element in life's journey. He introduces this idea in "The Gyres" (1936):

> The gyres! Old Rocky Face look forth;
> Things thought too long can be no longer thought
> For beauty dies of beauty, worth of worth,
> And ancient lineaments are blotted out.
> Irrational streams of blood are staining earth;
> Empedocles has thrown all things about;
> Hector is dead and there's a light in Troy.
> We that look on but laugh in tragic joy.

Concerning the concept of tragic joy, Jeffares states, "This brave opposition to decay and death was part of Yeats's mental make-up" (Commentary 362). The coldness Yeats speaks of in his introduction is exemplified here. All must accept life and remain detached. Yeats says:

> There is in the creative joy of acceptance of what life brings, because we have understood the beauty of what it brings, or a hatred of death for what it takes away, which arouses within us, through some sympathy perhaps with all other men, an energy so noble, so powerful, that we laugh aloud and mock, in the terror or the sweetness of our exaltation, at death and oblivion" (Jeffares Commentary 362).

To learn to "laugh aloud and mock" will help us transcend the power of death. We must assert our humanity individually and collectively.

Tragic joy is also present in the poem "Lapis Lazuli" (1936) in which Yeats makes a parallel between the stage and life:

> All perform their tragic play
> There struts Hamlet, there is Lear,

> That's Ophelia, that Cordelia;
> Yet they, should the last scene be there,
> The great stage curtain about to drop,
> If worthy their prominent part in the play,
> Do not break up their lines to weep.
> They know that Hamlet and Lear are gay;
> Gaiety transfiguring all that dread.

In life we must be detached and cold as players on a stage in order to accept life and its joys and disappointments. If we do not remain detached, we will be unable to function in the tragedy of life, just as actors on a stage must not become so involved in the story that their emotions cause them to forget their part.

The subject of "Lapis Lazuli" is a stone given to Yeats on his 70th birthday on which is a beautiful carving. In the scene carved on the stone are three Chinamen whose "ancient, glittering eyes, are gay." The image reminds us that all life is tragic and beautiful. The stone is beautiful; it is an object of art and a gift from a friend. Yeats affirms the value of art when he says, "All things fall and are built again / And those that build them are gay." He also comments on the "meaning" of a work of art and says that it "exists not in the artist alone but as well in the interpreter" (Unterecker 260). The imagination of the viewer greatly determines the "meaning" of the work of art. Yeats invites the reader to imagine becoming a part of the scene on the stone in which the three Chinamen climb a snow-topped mountain toward a "little half-way house." Yeats says, "I / Delight to imagine them seated there," though in the scene they are not actually at the house. The stone symbolizes eternity. While art can deteriorate or be destroyed, it can be created again by those who experience tragic joy.

In "The Municipal Gallery Re-visited" (1937), Yeats reveals art's influential power. In the poem Yeats surveys portraits of various people who have given meaning to his life--Augusta Gregory, John Synge, and various political leaders. The impact of these works of art is overwhelming to him:

> 'This is not' I say
> 'The dead Ireland of my youth, but an Ireland
> The poets have imagined, terrible and gay.'. . .
>
> Heart smitten with emotion I sink down
> My heart recovering with covered eyes;
> Wherever I had looked I had looked upon
> My permanent or impermanent images.

In his comments on his visit to the gallery, Yeats says, "For a long time I had not visited the Municipal Gallery. I went there a week ago and was restored to many friends. I sat down, after a few minutes, overwhelmed with emotion. There were pictures painted by men, now dead, who were once my intimate friends" (Poems 674). He describes this display as:

> the events of the last thirty years in fine pictures . . . . Ireland seen because of the magnificent vitality of her painters, in the glory of her passions. For the moment I could think of nothing but that Ireland: that great pictured song . . . . In those rooms of the Municipal Gallery I saw Ireland in spiritual freedom (Poems 674).

Man-made objects, "pictures painted by men," they reflect the spirit of the artist and thus of all mankind. Transitory man produces unchanging works of art through which Yeats sees the unchanging spirit of the nation. In describing the portrait of Lady Gregory, Yeats says:

> My mediaeval knees lack health until they bend,
> But in that woman, in that household where
> Honour had lived so long, all lacking found.
> Childless I thought 'my children may find here
> Deep-rooted things,' but never foresaw its end,
> And now that end has come I have not wept;
> No fox can foul the lair the badger swept.

Yeats says here that the end has come to something which in his younger days he thought would never die. He refers to Lady Gregory's estate and the aristocratic values it represented--courtesy, tradition, and honor. But these values can remain alive through "the magnificent vitality of her [Ireland's] painters," which can inspire future generations, and as long as we have these images, "no fox can foul the lair the badger swept." These portraits of men no longer living inspire Yeats to create his own portrait--his poem. Art inspires art:

> You that would judge me do not judge alone
> This book or that, come to this hallowed place
> Where my friends' portraits hang and look thereon;
> Ireland's history in their lineaments trace;
> Think where man's glory most begins and ends
> And say my glory was I had such friends.

"[Yeats] identifies his work with theirs. Readers should not judge his book . . . alone but should visit the gallery to understand how their work is intertwined with Irish history" (Adams 235). Not only did these people inspire Yeats in life, but they continue to do so in death.

Yeats discusses the responsibility and function of the artist in "Under Ben Bulben" (1938):

Poet and sculptor do the work
Nor let the modish painter shirk
What his great forefathers did,
Bring the soul of man to God,
Make him fill the cradles right . . .

Michael Angelo left a proof
On the Sistine Chapel roof
Where but half-awakened Adam
Can disturb globe-trotting Madam
Till her bowels are in heat,
Proof that there's a purpose set
Before the secret working mind:
Profane perfection of mankind.

The artist has a responsibility to produce models of perfection for society "by providing the ideal of sexual desire," such as Michaelangelo did (Adams 238). The importance of ancestry, as in "My Table," is the focus here. The artist has the responsibility to carry on what his forefathers have taught him. The artist is responsible for upholding his sacred heritage, that of his family, his nation, and the human race. Art connects us all. Yeats says that we can become closer to God through art since art mirrors man's soul. The artist can influence people and inspire them to strive for high values in their lives. But in order for man to act, he must have an incentive or a driving force behind him:

Even the wisest man grows tense
With some sort of violence
Before he can accomplish fate
Know his work or choose his mate.

Art can be this force. In previous poems such as "A Prayer for My Daughter" the wind in particular and nature in general have symbolized this driving force or

emotional awareness that propels man to act. Now Yeats is concentrating on the importance of art, but this "violence" is the same driving force he refers to in "A Prayer for my Daughter" and "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen." The word "violence" does not signify a ruthless action but rather an inspiring power. One cannot be complacent and make a decision. Yeats states that if the artist does his job properly, man's lineage will prosper. "The artist must shape into order the disordered world around him" (Garab 51). Yeats looks to the artist to provide relief from troubled modern life and the uncertain future:

> Irish poets learn your trade
> Sing whatever is well made,
> Scorn the sort now growing up
> All out of shape from toe to top,
> Their unremembering hearts and heads
> Base-born products of base beds.
> Sing the peasantry, and then
> Hard-riding country gentlemen,
> The holiness of monks, an after
> Porter-drinkers' randy laughter;
> Sing the lords and ladies gay
> That were beaten into the clay
> Through seven heroic centuries;
> Cast your mind on other days
> That we in coming days may be
> Still the indomitable Irishry.

This passage stresses the importance of art as a vehicle for preserving a nation's heritage. Yeats ends this poem with his own epitaph:

> Cast a cold eye
> On life, on death.
> Horseman, pass by!

These last lines vibrate with tragic joy. He seems to be saying: Transcend the mundane. Maintain your dignity in the face of death.

In "The Statues" (1938), Yeats presents art, specifically classical Greek art, as a means of salvation for modern, chaotic Ireland. Based on precise geometrical measurements, Greek art serves as a model for succeeding generations:

> Pythagoras planned it. Why did the people stare?
> His numbers though they moved or seemed to move
> In marble or in bronze, lacked character.
> But boys and girls pale from the imagined love
> Of solitary beds knew what they were,
> That passion could bring character enough;
> And pressed at midnight in some public place
> Live lips upon a plummet-measured face.

Though numbers themselves seem inhuman, precise measurements are necessary for an ideal form. This thought reflects Yeats's statement that art is a phantasmagoria; in order for the artist to produce a beautiful form of art, he must be emotionally detached or cool. Again, here is the coolness Yeats spoke of in his introduction. The artist must look at the work with a discriminating and calculating eye. He must understand the mechanics of creation. Thus the paradox that in order for the work of art to evoke emotions, it must be created without them. The artist must concentrate on details--measurements, words, spaces on a canvas.

In the last stanza Yeats links Ireland to Greek civilization:

> When Pearse summoned Cuchulain to his side,
> What stalked through the Post Office? What intellect,
> What calculation, number, measurement, replied?
> We Irish, born into that ancient sect
> But thrown upon this filthy modern tide
> And by its formless, spawning, fury wrecked,
> Climb to our proper dark, that we may trace
> The lineaments of a plummet-measured face.

Ireland has the potential to be as successful as the Greeks did if it will look to Greece as a model. Yeats says Ireland should use intellect rather than emotion to bring herself out of "this filthy modern tide," which is modern civilization. Yeats underscores this desire in the section of his autobiography entitled "The Trembling of the Veil":

> We had in Ireland imaginative stories, which the uneducated classes knew and even sang, and might we not make those stories current among the educated classes, rediscovering for the work's sake what I have called, "the applied arts of literature," the association of literature, that is with music, speech, and dance; and at last, it might be, so deepen the political passion of the nation that all, artist and poet, craftsman and day-labourer would accept a common design? Perhaps even these images, once created and associated with river and mountain, might move of themselves and with some powerful even turbulent life . . ." (Autobiography 131).

The statue, a work of art, symbolizes the means by which we can raise ourselves to a higher plane, transcend the chaos, escape potential destruction, and perhaps leave a legacy for future generations as Greece has left for us.

"Long-legged Fly" (1938) also deals with the past, brought to us by art, as a model for the present and the future:

That civilization may not sink
Its great battle lost,
Quiet the dog, tether the pony
To a distant post . . .

That girls at puberty may find
The first Adam in their thought,
Shut the door of the Pope's chapel,
Keep those children out.
There on the scaffolding reclines
Michael Angelo.
With no more sound than the mice make
His hand moves to and fro.

Art serves as the conveyor of values. Michaelangelo, serves as the model for idealism. We need some image of perfection, however unreachable, to emulate. Art is a mirror that reflects the soul of the creator. We see the spirits of past generations in art. They permeate our lives and remain alive through us. They inspire us to action.

In "A Bronze Head" (1937-38), a bronze head of Maud Gonne is the art object which represents intangible qualities. The figure reflects Maud's intangible qualities, those both admired and disliked by Yeats:

Here at right of the entrance this bronze head,
Human, super-human, a bird's round eye,
Everything withered and mummy-dead.
What great tomb-haunter sweeps the distant sky;
(Something may linger there though all else die;)
And finds there nothing to make its terror less
Hysterica-passio of its own emptiness?

The art form appears to Yeats both human and super-human. It seems human because it represents human characteristics, and it seems super-human because it

remains when humans die. It outlives humans. It lacks the passions, weaknesses, and mortality of man, but yet it serves as the medium through which these qualities remain alive. Yeats refers to Maud's spirit when he says, "Something may linger there though all else die." In the last stanza Yeats expresses his feelings about the chaos of the present:

> Or else I thought her supernatural;
> As though a sterner eye looked through her eye
> On this foul world in its decline and fall,
> On gangling stocks grown great, great stocks run dry,
> Ancestral pearls all pitched into a sty,
> Heroic reverie mocked by clown and knave
> And wondered what was left for massacre to save.

Here Yeats has a hopeless view of the world. Not only does the present generation lack appreciation of the past, but it mocks the greatness of the past. Maud's statue reminds us that we have a responsibility to uphold the past. The "sterner Eye" represents a force greater than the human, a collective spirit, something propelling us to act. In this poem, the spirit does not see much happiness and hope for the future, only decay. Though this poem contains a dim view of life, it reminds us that art has the power to evoke what makes us human--emotions. The fact that we are affected by what the statue represents, though that message may be dismal, is a testament to the power of art.

Conclusion

In his quest for wisdom, Yeats continually contradicts himself. At times, he expresses a contentment and acceptance of life, but at other times he questions the unfairness of the world. Yeats searches for something to ease the pain of mortality, and often art, which preserves life, provides this relief. At times, though, Yeats finds nothing to assuage the meaningless and emptiness in life, as even art can be destroyed. At times, poem contradicts poem, but one poem which, itself, contains opposing viewpoints is "Vacillation" (1931-1932). In the first section Yeats questions the meaning of life:

> Between extremities
> Man runs his course;
> A brand, or flaming breath,
> Comes to destroy
> All those antinomies
> Of day and night;
> The body calls it death,
> The heart remorse.
> But if these be right
> What is joy?

In this section Yeats represents life as pointless. A "brand"--fire--and "flaming breath"--another definition of "wind"--are both forces which control man. Nature's breath--the wind--can wipe out all life's contraries which had previously seemed

important. Eventually, however, even the fact that contraries exist is not important since all will be destroyed. In section IV Yeats states that he at times experiences moments of intense joy:

> My fiftieth year had come and gone,
> I sat, a solitary man,
> In a crowded London shop,
> An open book and empty cup
> On the marble table-top.
>
> While on the shop and street I gazed
> My body of a sudden blazed;
> And twenty minutes more or less
> It seemed, so great my happiness,
> That I was blessed and could bless.

At other times he fails to see the beauty around him, as he states in section V:

> Although the summer sunlight gild
> Cloudy leafage of the sky,
> Or wintry moonlight sink the field
> In storm-scattered intricacy,
> I cannot look thereon,
> Responsibility so weighs me down.

Section VI contains a contradiction in a single breath:

> From man's blood-sodden heart are sprung
> Those branches of the night and day
> Where the gaudy moon is hung.
> What's the meaning of all song?
> 'Let all things pass away.'

While Yeats acknowledges that conflict is inherent in man, he also questions the meaning of life. Yeats "oscillates between options only to accept ultimately the

human limits that make conflict the law of our condition" (Parkinson The Later Poetry 50).

In his essay, "The Body of Father Christian Rosencrux," Yeats says, ". . . art is a revelation, and not a criticism, and the life of the artist is in the old saying, 'The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth; so is every one that is born of the Spirit" (Essays 197). With his knowledge of Irish legends as backdrop, Yeats forms a network of interacting, overlapping, and interconnecting wind images. "The wind can sigh in the reeds with suggestions of another world, other creatures, voices of a strange truth; . . . [and] it can cry monstrously" (Adams 105). Yeats's sinister wind may reflect the turmoil he sees in the world as well as announce imminent destruction. It may remind man of his powerlessness in the face of nature, and it may encourage man to act.

Adams sums up Yeats's poetry: "Each poem is part of a total drama that we can constitute as a story. It is a fictive story about a poet from young manhood to death, who attempts to deal with himself, with people, with thought, and with time and to create a body of poetry" (9). Yeats's poetic wandering in search of wisdom reflects his own attempt to explain turmoil and to put into perspective his own place in society and in the world, and the perplexity of his old age incites him to rail against the wind and unfairness in life. T.S. Eliot says that while new experiences can be advantageous for the artist and provide him with new material, "very few poets have shown this capacity of adaptation to the years.

It requires, indeed, an exceptional honesty and courage to face the change" (Eliot 337), and Yeats, according to O'Donnell, "found that the only permanence [in life] is in the change" (66).

Yeats continually uses his gift of the power of words to explore opposing impulses in life. Man naturally questions, searches, and struggles, and when he ceases to do so, his life loses meaning. The questioning itself is what stimulates the mind and causes the soul to sing. When one is no longer aware of life's contraries, he dies. These contraries appear in art as well as life because, as Arra Garab has stated, "synthesis, Yeats learned early, grew from dialectical tensions and not from easy answers" (3). "Art is synthesis," according to Young, "when civilizations and religions and moments of historical change are brought together" (71). In this regard, Yeats "saw that major literary forms could thrive on opposing viewpoints and contrary possibilities" (Young xi). As he expresses in his autobiography, he is very much aware of his responsibility in keeping his heritage alive: "I thought to create that sensuous, musical vocabulary, and not for myself only, but that I might leave it to later Irish poets, much as a mediaeval Japanese painter left his style as an inheritance to his family" (Autobiography 102).

"The simple triumph of trying to be a total man was Yeats's final accomplishment" (Garab 101). Yeats's art is his poems, his legacy, his singing, and contains the souls of his ancestors made eternal through art--his song. It is "a kind of literary equivalent for the total experience of a man" (Unterecker 5). The fact that his poems offer opposing viewpoints tells us why we must view them as a

whole in order to appreciate his legacy, his literary will to us. He seems to be saying: Spend your life nourishing your soul and pass down your knowledge and your skills, your legacy of intellectual and artistic gifts. Let your soul and those of your forefathers merge into those of your descendants.

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